Chapter 6.0 Support

Ladd Field's wartime missions required support from a variety of military units including the Army Air Forces, the regular Army, the National Guard, and civilian staff. Responsibilities ranged from the most mundane duties, like baking bread, to the most adventurous, like search and rescue. All were part of the total effort it took to build, maintain, house, feed and equip a sub-arctic air station with over 4,000 personnel.[82]

Figure 32. Officers at 4th Infantry building, Ladd Field, May 1941. Brig. Gen. Simon Bolivar Buckner of the Alaska Defense Command at right center, holding envelope. Courtesy Elmendorf AFB History Office.

4th Infantry

In October 1940, Company L of the 4th Infantry Regiment arrived at Ladd to provide airfield defense and security. They were combat-ready regular Army ground troops. They remained on duty at Ladd until the summer of 1943, when they were transferred to Fort Richardson and eventually to the European theater. It was this unit that was called on to protect Ladd Field and assist Fairbanks civil authorities in guarding critical local infrastructure in the days after Pearl Harbor.

For a time, this unit also provided boot camp training for local recruits joining the armed services at Ladd Field. Frank Nigro enlisted in December 1942 and remembered training under infantry supervision. Winter training could be an adventure in extreme cold, and that month temperatures had dropped to 40 and 50 below zero. "It was so cold that they couldn't allow us to go on the firing range because of the ice fog; we couldn't see the targets anyway. But one day the temperature rose to 38 below zero and the sun was breaking in, so they said, 'We're going out.' So there we were, they took us out to the range. That day I had to do the firing, and the next day I had to pull the target so the other guys could fire. So I got over there, and gee I could just barely see the target, but I made it." Robert Redding, who served as an enlisted man in the Air Corps, also recalled taking his training around the same time. He remembered that his cohort of local recruits drilled indoors until it warmed up to 30 below. Then the men went outdoors for war games. "The recruits were the invaders and were supposed to conquer the regular men," he wrote. "We were given parkas, which when turned inside out were snow white, a perfect camouflage. Because we were accustomed to stalking game in the woods during hunting season, we easily fooled the enemy and won most of the battles."[83]

2nd Lieutenant (now ret. Col.) Richard F. Dennison served with Company L as a platoon leader, mess officer, and exchange officer in 1940-1941 before being assigned to detached service at the University of Alaska. "The field was very small with a very small complement," he wrote.[84] He recalled that the infantry

[82] Units rotated and commands reorganized over time. No comprehensive account of all units serving at Ladd was located during this project. Known support units are described here, but this list may not be complete.

[83] Robert H. Redding, "Battle of Ladd was a Strange Fight," *Fairbanks Daily News-Miner,* 18 August 1991, H-6.

[84] Richard F. Dennison, Col. USA (Ret), correspondence with author, Aug 2002.

barracks, including officers' quarters, were one-story wooden temporary buildings. Asked about the unit's achievements, Dennison remarked, "Obviously we were very efficient in our role of airfield security since the Japanese never attacked. In fact, they never got beyond Kiska." He added, "Our morale was high and we were proud of our mission accomplishments."

Figure 33. Maj. Hobart Murphy, CO of 4th Infantry at Ladd. Courtesy Richard Dennison.

Figure 34. Lts. Dunphy and Rager in Co. L's boat. Courtesy Richard Dennison.

Figure 35. Left to right, Lt. Dunphy, Lt. Dennison, east of Ladd Field, winter 1940-41. Courtesy Richard Dennison.

Alaska National Guard

Company C of the 297th Infantry Battalion was organized as the Fairbanks component of the newly created Alaska National Guard in 1940. At first, the company was comprised of merchants, miners, laborers, and college students, among others. In September 1941, as the threat of U.S. involvement in World War II increased, the Alaska National Guard was federalized. Some of the original Fairbanks members of this company were later reassigned to other Army units and dispersed to various fighting fronts during the war.

Company C served at Ladd from September 1943 to August 1944, though by then many of its original members had been re-assigned. At Ladd, the company was assigned to replace the 4th Infantry, which had been transferred. Their primary duty was to guard Lend-Lease aircraft.

The 297th Infantry was renamed the 208th Infantry in 1944 while Company C was still at Ladd. By the end of 1944, the various elements of the 208th had been centralized under a unified command in Anchorage. In May 1945, the unit was deactivated.[85]

The Alaska National Guard of World War II should not be confused with the Alaska Territorial Guard, a separate entity.

[85] Information in this section compiled from C.A. Salisbury, *Soldiers of the Mists: Minutemen of the Alaska Frontier,* (Missoula: Pictorial Histories Publishing Co., 1992) and John Grainger, *The Alaska National Guard in the Defense of Alaska,* unpublished manuscript, chapter 6, page 7.

Base Operations

Originally, when Ladd Field was a small cold weather test station, base operations were coordinated under the test program. In February 1942, base operations were officially separated from cold weather testing into a base detachment. A post headquarters detachment was also organized a few months later.[86]

Base headquarters was located in Hangar One. It supported the commander's office, executive officer, adjutant, sergeant major, personnel, public relations, message center and other general operating functions.[87] The commander's office was located in the northeast corner of the second floor.

Bill Stroecker was initially assigned to the personnel office. He maintained the officers' personnel files, known as 201 files. "I interviewed almost all the officers when they came to Ladd and got acquainted with them, and acquainted with their past history, all of which was contained in the 201 file. So I had probably… better knowledge of those who came and took more interest in the whole thing historically than the average may have done." Robert Redding also served as an enlisted man in headquarters early in the war. His job was in the ration section, distributing food supplies to the mess halls according to a strict formula. He recalled in an article that "Inside of six months I was bloody and torn, but unbowed, from the tirades of mess sergeants who swore I was starving people." By his own observation, though, "everybody was fat and sassy."[88]

Coast Artillery/Arkansas National Guard

The 206th Coast Artillery (Anti-aircraft) of the Arkansas National Guard arrived in Alaska in September 1941. Most of the unit was deployed to the Aleutians, where they participated in the defense of Fort Mears during the Japanese attack on Dutch Harbor in June 1942. However, men from Battery H were sent to Ladd Field instead, where they served for one year between September 1941 and September 1942. At the end of their tour at Ladd, Battery H was transferred to Fort Richardson.

When the men of Battery H first arrived at Ladd, facilities were still under construction. The men reported being quartered in Hangar One over the first winter until their regular quarters were completed in the spring. One private recalled the arrangement, "'Bunks and lockers were arrayed in long lines extending the length of the building….Our mess hall was in the same hangar (without partitions) and our orderly room was at one end as well as supply room. Although entirely lacking in any kind of privacy, the quarters were very adequate and, most important – warm!'"[89] Later, they occupied regular quarters southwest of the runway in a cluster shown on contemporary maps as the Coast Artillery Garrison.

[86] This became Company E of the 439th Base HQ and Air Base Squadron. It was transferred under the ATC during the October 1943 command change, then disbanded and reorganized within ATC in April 1944. OHLF 61, 63, 73.

[87] Telephone directory, Ladd Field, September 15, 1941.

[88] Redding, "Battle of Ladd…" H5-H7.

[89] Donald M. Goldstein and Katherine V. Dillon, *The Williwar War: The Arkansas National Guard in the Aleutians in World War II,* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 1992), 62-63.

The Air Corps provided the unit with Arctic clothing, which the men reported as excellent. However, the battery was poorly equipped to defend the airfield. When they first arrived, they were supplied with three 37mm AA guns, six .50 caliber machine guns, 140 M1 rifles, and one .22 rifle. Soldiers recalled that there was no ammunition for anything but the single .22 rifle, and a historian remarked that "…one wonders how the men equipped with the other weapons were supposed to practice using them, let alone help defend Ladd Field and the Fairbanks area."[90] After Pearl Harbor, ammunition for the 37mm anti-aircraft guns was flown up from Anchorage along with one case of ammunition for the machine gun platoon. Because the unit had not been able to fire the anti-aircraft guns until the ammunition arrived, they belatedly discovered that in the cold, the recoil mechanism didn't work. The guns had to be thawed and lubricated with antifreeze instead of oil.[91]

Figure 36. Anti-aircraft emplacement, May 1942. AAF photo.

One Fairbanks woman reported that the local schoolgirls were impressed by Coast Artillery soldiers, many of whom were just out of high school themselves. "And then there was a unit from Arkansas that was of all things, a Coast Artillery that came up here. Of course, all the young girls in Fairbanks all went for all these guys," she laughed, " 'cause they were young, a lot of them were teenagers, so most of the girls in town went out on dates with military guys. First it was Air Force guys, and then when the Coast Artillery guys from Arkansas came up here, they dropped all the Air Force guys and went out with the Coast Artillery guys. 'Cause...well, there were boys going to school with us, but they weren't as exciting as these military guys that came in their uniforms!"

Communications

The Signal Corps and the Army Airways Communications System (AACS) ran the communications functions at Ladd. The AACS was responsible for all aspects of aircraft communications and control tower operations. The Signal Corps operated the Alaska Communications System (ACS) which handled military and civilian long-distance telephone communication in the Territory, and also provided base telephone service, tactical communications, and audio visual equipment. Civilian assistance was also an important part of the mix, particularly in the early years. The Civil Aeronautics Administration (CAA), Pacific Alaska Airways and amateur radio operators all contributed to the operations at Ladd Field.

Irene Noyes was a telephone operator at Ladd early in the war. She operated a switchboard for the 14th Signal Company. "Everything was by hand," she

[90] Goldstein, 31.
[91] Goldstein, 83-84.

Figure 37. Entrance to Signal Corps office, ca 1944 (Bldg 1562). Ferris Copper collection, 99-183-983, Archives and Manuscripts, Alaska and Polar Regions Department, University of Alaska Fairbanks.

recalled. "We only had one line to Anchorage, and, of course, the main depot was in Anchorage." She added,

> The Army and the Air Force needed supplies for the winter at Fort Richardson at Anchorage, with the depot. We'd call them, and it took me all day to make one call… because I could have stuck my head out the window and hollered for all the good it did.… We'd have to spell out the words and leave it to Healy, I think it was, and then that operator would get Anchorage when it was available….

One time she had to place an order for 300 pairs of long johns. "And you sit there and holler, 'Long johns!'" she laughed. "I would be hoarse, just to whisper for days. I finally had to quit 'cause I got so hoarse."

During 1942, the Signal Corps improved post telephone systems and tactical stations, and integrated its radio communications with CAA remote sites. The Signal Corps was also given responsibility for equipping the AACS, although the Air Corps operated that service.[92]

The AACS had faced difficulties in its early operations at Ladd. The AACS station officially went into operation in February 1941, operating that first winter from an unidentified 12 by 15 foot lean-to on a log cabin garage. They reported problems with equipment at cold temperatures, iced antennae, lack of parts and equipment, and interference from nearby construction machinery. To add to the handicaps, they operated control tower functions from the lean-to, which had no view of the runway.[93] Fortunately the arrangement was temporary, and AACS moved into Hangar One when facilities there were completed.

Winged Messengers

The Signal Corps and the Cold Weather Test Detachment cooperated to evaluate the performance of communications pigeons at Ladd Field. Referring to the arrival of the "soldier birds" in 1941, the *Fairbanks Daily News-Miner* noted that the pigeons would be trained to home in on mobile lofts and could be released from aircraft. "Noiselessly, in the strictest secrecy an entire squadron of United States Army fliers is warming up at Ladd Field…preparatory to a mass takeoff into Arctic skies…." A stationary pigeon loft was located northwest of the MARS building (1024.)

- "Winged Squadron…," *Fairbanks Daily News-Miner*, 20 Dec 1941, 1.

AACS grew quickly to accommodate the hundreds of flights which passed through the airfield every month during the height of operations. By 1944, the 16th AACS had eight officers and approximately 90 enlisted men on duty.[94] After the arrival of the Women's Army Corps in April 1945, the AACS also had WAC staff. At least 16 WAC personnel were assigned to AACS duties through the end of the war. They included experienced radio operators fluent in Morse code, as well as teletype operators and clerks. At other AAF stations, WACS served as radio operators, cryptographers, and air traffic controllers.[95]

[92] Woodman, 235, 126. 172nd Infantry Brigade (Alaska), *The U.S. Army in Alaska,* Pamphlet 360-5, May 1976, 97.
[93] "Report of Operations…," 70-71; 74-75.
[94] MHR, May 1944 appendix. The figure may include personnel at outlying stations.
[95] MHR, Sept 1945. Re WACS at other duty stations, Treadwell 290. The first WAC in the country who ever served flying duty as a B-17 radio operator was among the AACS contingent at Ladd. Prior to her assignment to Ladd, Sgt. Margaret Flanagan had flown with B-17 patrols along the East Coast. LFMS, 18 May 1945, 4.

During Lend-Lease, both U.S. and Russian radio operators shared AACS radio functions to make the bilingual airfield function safely. A 1945 report stated that the 60th AACS was operating Ladd's airways communications from an operational center and control tower in Hangar One. The Hangar One communications station had five Army radio positions, three teletype positions, and one Russian operated position. The control tower also had a Russian language component. Up in the tower there were two positions, one Army-operated and one Russian. An American interpreter manned the Russian-language position, under the supervision of an AACS operator.[96]

The amateur radio community also helped with communications operations in the early days of Ladd Field. Augie Hiebert was the Fairbanks coordinator for the Aircraft Warning Service in 1941 and described how the amateur radio community pitched in to help before the war. "It looked like war was coming on. I was an avid amateur radio operator and I organized an aircraft warning system in connection with an Army captain … because we knew that… they didn't have anything. So we set up the hams around the state to be watchdogs. That was… in place, although we never had a chance to test it. The war came in the meantime." He explained how it would work: "[W]e had amateurs that would call in at a certain time on a certain frequency and describe what they saw, if anything. So

MARS Building

The Military Affiliate Radio System (MARS) is a network of amateur radio operators which provides a method of communication in the event of emergency. It includes both civilian and military members. MARS was originally formed through the Signal Corps as the Army Amateur Radio System (AARS) in 1925. The organization was temporarily discontinued when airwaves were restricted during World War II. Amateur radio operators assisted with the Aircraft Warning Service instead during that time, reporting potential aircraft sightings to the military authorities. After the war, the Army reactivated the AARS briefly. In 1948 the organization became the Military Amateur Radio System, and later acquired its present name.

Building 1024 has been known as the MARS Building for many years, although this name dates from a period after the war. During World War II, the building was described simply as a radio transmitter building. It is not known at this writing which communications units were using it or for what specific purposes. Transmitter antennae can be seen surrounding the building in the ca. 1944 photo.

Figure 38. Radio transmitter building with signal array. Detail, Rex Wood photo.

[96] MHR, Sept 1945.

that was the philosophy of it, that was the means where they would be able to transmit warning, because there was no other means to do that, no telephones, no Army system, no Air Force system, no CAA or FAA system."

Depot Organizations/6th Air Depot Group

Military aircraft could not keep flying without the assistance of air depots and maintenance crews. When Alaska's first Air Corps units began to operate at Ladd and Elmendorf Fields, repair and maintenance organizations had to follow them in and set up shop. Before the war, when the operations at both airfields were still quite limited, aircraft and supplies were provided by the Sacramento Air Depot in California. Beginning in February 1941, units of the 23rd Air Base Group, headquartered at Elmendorf, arrived to take care of on-site maintenance and repair. Detachments from this group were also present at Ladd Field.

After the United States entered the war, depot functions in Alaska were reorganized. In February 1942, the Sacramento Air Depot activated two sub-depots to take over Air Corps supply activities, one at Ladd and one at Elmendorf. The sub-depots' primary concern was to service tactical aircraft for what became the Eleventh Air Force, headquartered at Elmendorf Field. A few months later, in the summer of 1942, the 11th Air Force Service Command was activated and took command of these sub-depots. In August, the Ladd sub-depot was redesignated as the Alaska Air Depot (AAD), while the Elmendorf unit remained a sub-depot, the 342nd. The Alaska Air Depot's mission was to support the Eleventh Air Force by maintaining and improving aircraft and equipment for use in the Alaska Theater. Its responsibilities also included distributing parts and supplies to Elmendorf.[97]

At the same time, Lend-Lease operations were beginning at Ladd, and the Cold Weather Test Detachment had just been re-established at the field. The new 6th Air Depot Group had arrived in July to support Lend-Lease activities and was soon attached to the Alaska Air Depot. However, because of the demands of the Lend-Lease program, Ladd Field personnel could not meet the needs of the tactical units in the Eleventh Air Force. The Alaska Air Depot had a short tenure at Ladd Field. Beginning in November 1942, personnel from the AAD began transferring to an expanded operation at Elmendorf. By March 1943, the Alaska Air Depot was formally moved to Elmendorf, taking over the sub-depot there. The 6th Air Depot Group, minus a few units which were sent to Elmendorf, was separated from the AAD and placed under the direct control of the Ladd Field commander.

The 6th Air Depot Group's mission was the supply and repair of aircraft, particularly in support of the Lend-Lease aircraft transfers. It was activated at Patterson Field in Ohio in January 1942 and arrived at Ladd on July third of that year. The group was composed of a headquarters squadron, repair squadron, and supply squadron, and had seven or eight miscellaneous attached units in areas such as ordnance, quartermaster, and signal. Together with the attached units, the 6th ADG numbered 43 officers and 850 enlisted men when it first arrived.[98] When the Air Transport Command took control of Ladd Field in October 1943,

[97] *Elmendorf Air Force Base Historic Context of World War II Buildings and Structures,* (U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, 1999) 51-53.

[98] OHLF 64. Some were eventually sent to Elmendorf.

it took over the 6th ADG as well. Six months later, in April 1944, the group was disbanded and the personnel were absorbed directly into ATC units.

Stan Jurek was assigned to the unit and recalled its arrival at Ladd. "We arrived here on July the 3rd of 1942, arrived at Ladd Field. We were going to celebrate the 4th of July, of course, but we found out later, that's when the Japs were on Attu, and we were restricted to the building. We couldn't even leave the building we were in. We had loaded rifles and gas masks and all that. So we weren't celebrating the 4th of July very much that year!"

Bill Stroecker was in the base headquarters unit when the 6th ADG arrived and observed that their arrival changed the dynamics at Ladd. "Ladd Field started and it was a very orderly place," he said. "It had a lot of old-time soldiers, you know, who'd been in the regular Army, and all of a sudden, when 6th depot people came they were mostly new soldiers and they didn't have the old esprit de corps, you might call it, that the old soldiers had. So it was kind of upsetting because everything changed. But after all, the priority was to deliver those planes to Russia." Before the 6th ADG arrived in anticipation of Lend-Lease, Stroecker recalled, "everything had centered around cold weather testing, a very orderly type of thing. There was no stress of war; that didn't enter into it to begin with. But after we started ferrying the planes, then everything was in a state of excitement, because there were these hundreds of planes coming into Ladd, and all of the pilots who flew them. I personally got transferred to the 6th Air Depot Group and was transferred down into a hangar on the west side…."

Stan Jurek's assignment was in supply. He remembered that the military supply chain provided some of the automotive items they needed but not everything, so he would make smaller purchases in town from the local merchants. In wartime, supplies were also difficult for Alaska dealers to get, and they needed to satisfy their local customers as well as the military. "Seems like the military sent big units, transmissions, rear ends, and all that stuff, but no spark plugs, no points, smaller parts. I'd practically buy the town out," he said. "Of course they couldn't get a lot of supplies during the war, so I was a busy guy, running back and forth, trying to find different parts, for instance, batteries. The military'd want a dozen batteries. I'd go to one of the dealers and maybe they got a dozen batteries in, but they had their customers waiting for them." Jurek recalled that the military had the authority to compel the dealers to sell him the parts he needed. "So I got orders if I knew they had them, the military would take over the garage or the parts department if they didn't sell 'em." He added that he always tried to be fair and divide his requests equitably among the different suppliers. "Well, you'd get three or four from one dealer, go to the other one. We managed to get along."

Engineers

Engineering and construction activities played an extremely important role in the wartime events throughout the Alaska theater.[100] This was as true at Ladd as it was elsewhere. At some level, every mission at Ladd Field depended on the work accomplished by the post engineering staff who supervised construction projects and maintained the infrastructure of the airfield.

Then as now, civil engineering functions involved a complex interplay of military, civilian, and contract work. Two organizations coordinated most of these efforts. The Resident Engineer office supervised all construction projects, while Post Engineer personnel maintained the infrastructure once it was completed. The Resident Engineers were a component of the Army Corps of Engineers, and reported to the Alaska Area Engineer in Anchorage. Ladd's Resident Engineers during the war included Col. James D. Bush, Col. Virgil Womeldorff, and Capt. E.D. Tracy. In his supervisory capacity as Alaska Area Engineer, Brig. Gen. Benjamin B. Talley was also associated with Ladd Field. Talley and Bush went on to notable careers in Alaska military engineering, and award-winning Fairbanks architect Lee Linck also served on the Ladd Field staff early in his career.

Fueling the Flightlines

Keeping the planes in the air also meant providing a steady uninterruptible supply of fuel. In the days before the discovery of the large Alaskan oilfields, petroleum supplies were imported to the Territory. Fuel could be shipped north on tankers and then sent by rail to the Interior. However, during the war, sea routes were potentially at risk from submarine attack, and oil tankers were needed elsewhere. The new Alaska-Canada (ALCAN) Highway, completed in November of 1942, provided the option of supplying fuel by truck, but that method would consume nearly as much fuel as it would deliver. To solve the problem, a pipeline known as the CANOL (Canadian Oil) Pipeline was constructed between 1942 and 1944, connecting oilfields in the Canadian Northwest Territories to a refinery at Whitehorse. From there delivery lines passed the product to Ladd Field, Watson Lake and Skagway. The CANOL was plagued by high construction costs and maintenance problems and only operated at its full capacity for twelve months. Sections were shut down as early as April 1945, although the line from Skagway to Fairbanks continued in use until the Haines-Fairbanks Pipeline was opened in 1955. Canol facilities at Ladd included a terminal and tank farm on Birch Hill.[99]

Douglas Colp was one of several University of Alaska graduates assigned to the Resident Engineers. He reported that the young engineering graduates provided valuable local expertise – so much so, that the officers in charge would not allow them to leave to attend officer candidate school. Among other projects, Colp worked on the installation of underground fuel storage tanks on Birch Hill. When the tanks were removed in the 1990s, engineers were impressed by their condition and by how successfully they had been sited and camouflaged.

Helen Baker Bowles was one of the civilians working for the Resident Engineer office. She had studied drafting at Fairbanks High School and was the first woman to be employed at Ladd as an engineering aide. She had studied drafting at Fairbanks High School, and went to work at Ladd during the summer of 1942. She reported that the

[99] Raoul Drapeau. Pipe Dream," *Invention and Technology,* Winter 2002, 25-35. Kristy Hollinger, *The Haines-Fairbanks Pipeline,* Center for Environmental Management of Military Lands, Colorado State University, Ft. Collins CO, April 2003.

[100] For more information Alaska military construction, see Bowman and Richardson, 1944, Bush, 1944; ; Cloe and Monaghan, 1984; Dod, 1987; Mighetto and Homstad, 1997; Talley, 1995; and Woodman, 1997.

first thing she was asked when she came to work was, "Can you make coffee?" Helen remarked, "From then on that was one of my duties, keep the coffee pot on." Among other duties, Helen also ran the Ozalid machine which copied maps and drawings. "It was a long process and I spent time sitting on a stool watching the material go through the machine," she wrote. But she also took part in field work, and learned how to operate a 5-speed truck. She spent two years with the engineering office, and in 1944, Helen married a weather squadron officer. When she got married, she was required to resign her position because of a rule prohibiting officers' wives from working on base.[101]

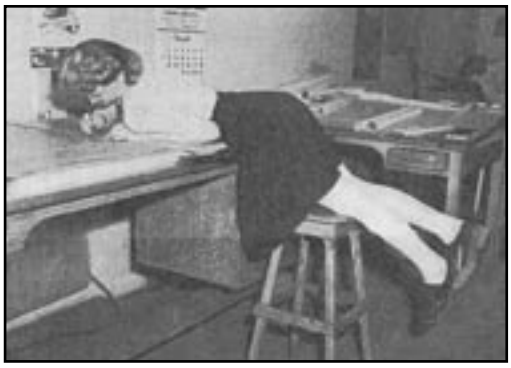

Figure 39. Helen Baker Bowles featured in Western Construction News. Courtesy Helen Baker Bowles.

Figure 40. Post Engineer offices, 1945. From Ladd Field Midnight Sun, *Pictorial of an Airbase*.

Combat engineering units also served at Ladd. Two of these units appear in the records. The first was the 151st Engineers. These men served at Ladd in the early years, around 1941. Later on, the 176th Engineers took part in the work on Ladd Field's alternate landing site at "26-Mile" field, although much of that project was contracted to a private firm. After the war the new airfield became Eielson Air Force Base, a separate installation.

In addition to the engineering work, there were administrative tasks to accomplish. Procurement, payroll, and correspondence kept the construction moving forward. Marcel Colp worked in mail distribution. She remembered that two women were assigned to review all the office mail, whether official or personal, since censorship was in effect. Thelma Walker was a file clerk and stenographer. She explained why so few of Ladd's early construction records have survived. Just before her arrival in May 1941, boxes full of correspondence and construction documents were carted away and burned by mistake during an office move.[102]

For background on Ladd Field construction, see Chapter 3. For information on Ladd's contributions to aeronautical engineering, see Chapter 4.

Medical and Veterinary

Ladd Field's first flight surgeon was Capt. John Copenhaver. During Ladd's first winter of operations in 1940-1941, the medical staff was small, and Copenhaver was assisted by a technical sergeant and five enlisted men. The medical department initially operated a ten-bed dispensary ward and pharmacy. Because the permanent hospital was not yet completed, Ladd used St. Joseph's, the local hospital in Fairbanks, for any cases that required hospitalization. In addition to caring for medical needs, the department participated in early cold weather testing, reporting on the health ramifications of the new airfield's water supply, sewage disposal, and ventilation conditions. By September 1941, Copenhaver had

[101] Correspondence and personal communication, Helen Bowles, August and September 2002.
[102] Personal communication, Thelma Walker, 19 August 2003.

been promoted to Major, and the department was staffed by at least six officers and a medical detachment, including a dental officer and one veterinarian.[103]

In September 1942, the 206th Station Hospital was activated with an initial capacity of 100 beds. It became Ladd's the main medical unit during the war. It operated out of the north wing of the combined hospital/barracks/theater building just northeast of Hangar One, in today's Bldg 1555. When it was activated, the 206th had ten officers, ten nurses and 62 enlisted men serving in the unit. In 1945, the station hospital had ten doctors and thirteen nurses. It was designed to accommodate 250 beds, although only about 150 were actually in place. In addition to the 206th hospital staff, the ATC had four additional doctors and two nurses of its own at that time, and the CWTD also had one doctor on its roster. Four dentists were also assigned to Ladd by 1945.[104]

Figure 41. Hospital/barracks, today's bldg 1555, ca. 1943. AAF photo.

The nurses had separate quarters northeast of the hospital, located in today's Building 1021. The 15 or so nurses assigned to Ladd Field were among the 6,000 Army Nurse Corps members worldwide who were serving with the Army Air Forces. Nurses assigned to the AAF received additional training for their duties and served at station hospitals like the one at Ladd.

Figure 42. Nurses quarters, Bldg 1021, as it appears today.

Ladd Field also maintained a small veterinary staff to support the Quartermaster Corps' kennels. The veterinary hospital had a twelve-dog capacity. The veterinary hospital and Quartermaster kennels were located on the west side of the railroad bridge in the vicinity of today's Trainer Gate Road/River Road intersection.

Additional research would be needed to reveal more information about the history of medical units at Ladd and their contribution to the well-being of the air base.

Figure 43. Kennel area, post-war. USAF photo.

Quartermaster Corps

The Quartermaster Corps (QMC) was the Army's arm for logistics, supply, and peacetime cantonment construction. It had several units present at Ladd. The Constructing Quartermaster was in charge of the original construction at Ladd Field. However, in January 1941, this responsibility was transferred to the Corps of Engineers (see Construction, chap. 3). During the war years, other Quartermaster units at Ladd included a general quartermaster section, a laundry detachment, a bakery company, and a truck platoon. In 1944, these

[103] Directory, Ladd Field, September 15, 1941. Re local hospital, CWT Report 1941, 78.
[104] MHR Jan 1945. Also OHLF 65.

units had over 150 personnel. In addition, the QMC also employed between 60 and 80 civilian staff at that time.

Several Quartermaster functions were located in the area to the west of the parade ground. Today's Bldg 1562 was a combined quartermaster warehouse, firehouse, and guard station. It also housed several offices including the post Quartermaster, Signal Corps, and a finance office. The actual warehouse, a freight office and a small commissary were located in a wood frame extension to the rear that no longer exists. The QMC laundry was located in a long, H-shaped wood frame building to the west behind the warehouse. Across today's Gaffney Road from the laundry site stood the bakery, and to the northwest of that was a dry cleaning, shoe repair, and reclamation shop.

The QMC also used facilities in the 900 area southeast of the airfield. The QMC truck platoon was housed in temporary barracks in an extension of the 900 area southeast of Clear Creek. They may also have used mess, warehouse, and garage facilities north of the Old Badger Road and Clear Creek at one time, although this area appears to have been assigned to the Air Transport Command in 1943 as a transient camp.[105]

The QMC also handled dog operations. Nationally, the Quartermasters were in charge of the War Dog program in World War II, training dogs and handlers at special camps. Most of the QMC dogs worldwide were used as guard dogs for sentry duty and by scout patrols for warnings against ambush. In Alaska the QMC also operated a sled dog program. At Ladd the emphasis was on sled dogs, and the base had a 50-dog kennel. It is believed the sled dogs occasionally went out in the field as part of cold weather test expeditions. They also were an important component of the wilderness search and rescue program (see Search and Rescue, below). It seems likely that knowledgeable Alaskan dog handlers such as Pvts. George Lockwood of Unalakleet and Carl Kawagley of Nome had an influence on official military procedures and helped adapt the program to local conditions. Further research could reveal more information about this aspect of the installation's history.

Figure 44. Quartermaster building, now Bldg 1562. Warehouse extension is visible to the rear. AAF photo.

Search and Rescue

In the early years of Ladd Field when flying operations were limited to cold weather testing, there were no special units available solely for search and rescue. Only a small number of planes were flying from the field and few wilderness crashes occurred. When they did, all available crews would pitch in to make aerial searches. However, as air operations expanded at Ladd Field during the war, the need for search and rescue units grew as well. Aircraft from the Cold Weather Test Detachment and the Air Transport Command as well as Russian Lend-Lease planes could be forced down in extremely remote wilderness areas.

[105] Bush, 23.

During the winter of 1942-1943, Base Engineering Officer (air) Maj. Richard C. Ragle was responsible for coordinating rescues and retrievals and preparing accident reports in addition to his other duties. A Fairbanks university professor and bush pilot, Ragle had been called to active duty with the Cold Weather Test Detachment at Ladd in 1941. He recalled in a memoir that after the Lend-Lease program got underway, the ad hoc method of responding to search and rescue crises became too demanding on the base resources. AAF Headquarters responded by creating an Arctic Search and Rescue Squadron assigned to the Alaskan Wing of the ATC in December 1943. "Flights" were established at points along the ALSIB route, and Ragle was placed in charge of the search and rescue flight based at Ladd.[106]

Flights included aircraft that were dedicated solely for search and rescue, and consisted of assigned pilots, a doctor, and specially trained enlisted men. In addition to search aircraft and crews, they had sled dogs, ground vehicles, and boats for summer use. Later on, dogs were even trained for parachute duty, prepared to jump with the medical officer down to a crash site.

The Quartermaster Corps was in charge of the kennels at Ladd Field, and it participated in search missions as well. In one particular case, the call was *Quartermasters to the rescue!* On February 11, 1944, two P-39s en-route to Ladd Field collided in mid-air and crashed about 18 miles east of Harding Lake. A search plane from Ladd located the wrecked aircraft and the two stranded pilots, but could not land in the area. The crew dropped emergency kits down to the men and instructed them to wait there overnight for a rescue party. Early the next morning, Base Quartermaster Maj. William Hammond and two QMC privates, George Lockwood and Carl Kawagley, loaded two nine-dog teams and emergency supplies into a truck and traveled sixty miles out to Birch Lake, the best staging area. There, a ski-equipped Norseman aircraft met them. The Norseman pilot, Capt. Gentry, took Kawagley aloft on a reconnaissance flight to the crash site. From the air, Gentry and Kawagley located a suitable trapper's trail through the wooded, rough country to the area where the downed pilots were stranded. They dropped a note with further instructions to the pilots on the ground and then returned to Birch Lake where Kawagley and Lockwood set out with the two dog teams.

The weather was marginal, with gusty wind and poor visibility from low clouds and ground fog. Parts of the trail were wind-blown and bare of snow cover, so travel was difficult. The drivers urged the dogs on, eager to complete their mission before winter darkness fell. When they arrived in the vicinity of the crash, the drivers called out to the missing men and signaled with a rifle shot, but received no answer. Because of blowing wind, they could not be heard. After covering another half mile of trail, they called out again and this time located the downed pilots. Lockwood and Kawagley loaded the men into the sled baskets, covered them with robes, and headed back over the rough trail. When they returned to Birch Lake after a total of 24 miles of "hard going," the

[106] Ragle eventually became a Lt. Col., and ended the war as officer in charge of ATC's worldwide Search, Rescue, and Survival section in Washington, DC. He returned to the University of Alaska Fairbanks after the war and later served as Chief of Education and Training for the Alaskan Air Command. Information on Ragle compiled from Richard C. Ragle, memoir, "The War in the Aleutians, The First Two Weeks" at http://jragle.chem.umass.edu/FRAMES2/aleuti~1.htm and correspondence with John Ragle, 19 June 2002.

Aircraft Down

Then-Lt. Milton Ashkins and his crew chief Sgt. R.A. Roberts experienced one of Ladd's earliest wilderness crashes when their O-38 came down southeast of Fairbanks on June 16, 1941. Their engine quit while they were flying at low altitude, and they crash-landed in a forested area. Having escaped injury, they radioed their location back to Fairbanks and another airplane dropped them emergency supplies including a rifle, rubber raft, rations and ammunition. The two men then made their way overland to a rendezvous point miles away ten days later. The aircraft was recovered in 1967 and eventually sent to Wright Patterson AFB in Ohio for exhibit.[107]

Figure 45. Lt. Milton Ashkins makes his way back from crash site with Sgt. R. A. Roberts, not pictured. Courtesy Elmendorf AFB History Office.

rescued pilots returned to Ladd Field in the waiting Norseman and the dogs and drivers headed back home in their truck.[108] Kawagley and Lockwood earned commendations for their participation in the successful rescue mission.

The most famous search and rescue mission at Ladd during the war years involved Lt. Leon Crane, "The Man Who Walked Out of Charley River."[109] The only survivor of a B-24 crash on Dec. 21, 1943, Crane endured 84 days alone in the wilds of the Charley River region. When the plane disappeared, aircrews from Ladd made an intense aerial search for crash survivors, but reluctantly abandoned the effort after three fruitless weeks. All the while, persistent ice fog blanketed the wooded valleys and river bottoms, obscuring the crash site from the eyes of the search teams.

Crane, who had parachuted onto a steep hillside, was not able to reach the inaccessible crash site and instead attempted to walk out along the river. He had no map and did not know where he was. He had no emergency equipment other than his down flight suit, parachute, matches, and a Boy Scout knife. Even his mittens had been left behind in the frantic escape from the aircraft. Crane traveled for nine days with no food during the darkest time of winter until he reached an uninhabited cabin with a cache of supplies. There, he treated his frostbite, replenished his strength, and found a map. Estimating he would have at least a two weeks' trek in subzero temperatures to reach the nearest settlement, Crane decided to wait it out in the shelter where he was until traveling conditions improved. Eventually he put together a makeshift sled, loaded it with provisions, and moved laboriously down the river. It was dangerous and slow going. He fell through the ice once, and on another occasion, the sled fell through and he nearly lost his remaining supplies. Finally, Crane reached an inhabited cabin 30 miles from the settlement of Woodchopper. A few days later, in March 1944, a mail plane pilot brought him from Woodchopper back to the astounded community at Ladd Field.

Figure 46. Ladd sled dog, ca. 1941. Courtesy Richard Dennison.

[107] "Retired General Recalls 1941 Alaskan Wilderness Crash," *Santa Barbara News-Press,* 19 September 1968, courtesy Milton Ashkins.

[108] HAD, 309.

[109] Compiled from Stephen M. Morrisette, "The Man Who Walked Out of Charley River," *Alaska at War,* Fern Chandonnet, ed., 143-146, and personal communication, Randy Acord, 13 June 2002.

Weather

Weather information was critical to the success of aerial operations. During the war, the Army's 16th Weather Squadron handled weather reporting along the Northwest Staging Route and had a detachment at Ladd.[110]

The weather office at Hangar One was located on the south side of the second floor, overlooking the airfield. A team of military and civilian weather observers and forecasters worked there simultaneously. On the military side, the unit consisted of weather observers, who were enlisted men, and forecasters, who were officers. The civilian staff were employees of the Weather Bureau, which also operated a weather station at Fairbanks' civilian airport, Weeks Field. Together they covered three eight-hour shifts. During the day, at least two forecasters would be on duty with between six and eight observers. On the night shifts, when traffic was down, the crew was slightly smaller.

Figure 47. Russian weather officer reading decoded weather report from Siberia. Rex and Lillian Wood collection, #2002-164-90, Archives and Manuscripts, Alaska and Polar Regions Archives, University of Alaska Fairbanks.

Every hour, the observers collected weather information such as the height and type of clouds, altimeter settings, visibility, and wind direction and velocity. Forecasters put the information together and plotted weather maps by hand when those were needed. They always encrypted the forecasts and hourly observations with special equipment before transmitting them via radio. A bank of teletype machines in the office were connected to other weather stations along the Northwest Staging Route.

Rex Wood was a weather observer at Ladd who originally came to Fairbanks as a civilian employee with the Weather Bureau.[111] He described the operations of the weather office, and recalled that the Weather Bureau staff worked on the same tasks next to their military counterparts. After working for the Weather Bureau for some time, Wood was drafted. When he completed boot camp at the outskirts of Ladd, Wood returned to the weather office and did the same work he had been doing before, trading the Weather Bureau shirt for the Army olive drab.

Figure 48. Ladd Field weather office ca 1943. Rex and Lillian Wood collection, #2002-164-86, Archives and Manuscripts, Alaska and Polar Regions Archives, University of Alaska Fairbanks.

Weather observation was a specialty. Wood recalled that some of the enlisted weather observers had been trained at Chanute Field in Illinois, but that others were transferred in with less experience. This caused an unusual mix of ranks and experience, and sometimes sergeants with less experience found themselves taking direction from corporals with more weather training.

[110] Smith, 120. Reports show that the 11th Air Force had a small weather detachment assigned as well. MHR, May 1944. In 1945, an additional weather office was operating out of Hangar Three. MHR, Jan 45.

[111] Personal communication, 14 January 2003.

Women's Army Corps

Near the end of the war, Ladd Field hosted the first Women's Army Corps (WAC) unit ever stationed in Alaska. Known as the 1466th AAF Base Unit, Squadron W, they arrived at Ladd in April 1945 and served until December of that year. This group of enlisted women and two officers were pioneers, although they were stationed in Alaska only for a brief time.

The history of the Ladd squadron is tied to the larger story of WAC service in World War II. In May 1942, Congress established the Women's Army Auxiliary Corps (WAAC), the predecessor of the WAC. Because it was an auxiliary corps, its members did not have full military status. This changed in July 1943 when the Women's Army Corps (WAC) replaced the WAAC. The new corps had regular Army status and operated under Army regulations. Because the Army Air Forces (AAF) were part of the Army structure at that time, women who served under AAF commands were technically members of the Women's Army Corps. These women's units were often referred to as the "Air WACs." Although the Air WACs served under the AAF, they should not be confused with the WASP: Women's Airforce Service Pilots, a separate organization who remained an auxiliary unit.[112] After World War II, when the Air Force became a separate service, the Air WACs were reconstituted as the Women's Air Force or WAF.

In World War II, regulations excluded women from combat and combat training, but WACs could fill a wide variety of other military positions. This was especially true in the Army Air Forces, which became well known under Gen. Arnold for supporting the Air WACs and opening many technical jobs to women. Enrollment in the Air WACs peaked in January 1945 with 40,000 members. About fifty percent of these women served in conventional clerical assignments while others took on more technical roles. The ATC, for example, employed WACs at information desks, dispatching offices, and to process passengers and supplies. The Air Service Command placed them at depots to keep track of stocks of technical equipment. Often women who joined the WAC already possessed education and skills. In addition to serving as drivers, clerks, and typists, skilled Air WACs could become mechanics, radio operators, postal workers, weather observers, equipment operators, control tower operators, cryptographers and photographers. The Army Airways Communications Service (AACS) employed WACs as radio operators and in airfield control towers. At some fields, WACs worked as airplane mechanics. Historian Mattie Treadwell summed up the WACs' versatility this way, "To employ the average WAC successfully, it proved necessary only to place her, fresh from basic training, on almost any airfield, where, if not immediately [pulled] into too many pieces by competing section chiefs, she ordinarily soon found useful employment."[113]

Ladd's WACs served under the Air Transport Command. It took quite a bit of advance preparation for the ATC to deploy WAC units to stations on the

[112] WASP pilots ferried aircraft in the contiguous U.S. but were not assigned to fly to Ladd Field. After the war, several former WASP pilots came to Fairbanks to settle, and they became well known locally: Celia Hunter, Ginny Woods, and Nancy Baker. Ms. Baker confirmed that no WASPs flew to Ladd during the war.

[113] Mattie E. Treadwell, *The Women's Army Corps* (Washington, DC: Department of the Army, Office of the Chief of Military History, 1954) 288. Additional information compiled from Bettie J. Morden, *The Women's Army Corps,* 1945-1978 (Washington, DC: U.S. Army, Center of Military History, 2000) 19-20; Treadwell 282, 290, 478; and *The Story of the WAF,* a brief report by an unknown author [1952], provided by Betty Wiker.

Ladd's First WAC

The first known WAC at Ladd Field was not part of the ATC unit. 1st Lt. Christine Goodall arrived as a solo officer on temporary duty with the Cold Weather Test Detachment a few months before the ATC's WAC squadron arrived at the field. Lt. Goodall was a project officer in aerial photography from the Extreme Temperature Operations Unit at Wright Field, Ohio. According to a newspaper account, she was a graduate of Smith College with a degree in mathematics and physics, was a private pilot, and had been employed in the Bendix Company aeronautical instruments laboratory before joining the WAC.

"First Ladd Wac Here With CWT," *Fairbanks Daily News-Miner*, 15 January 1945, 4.

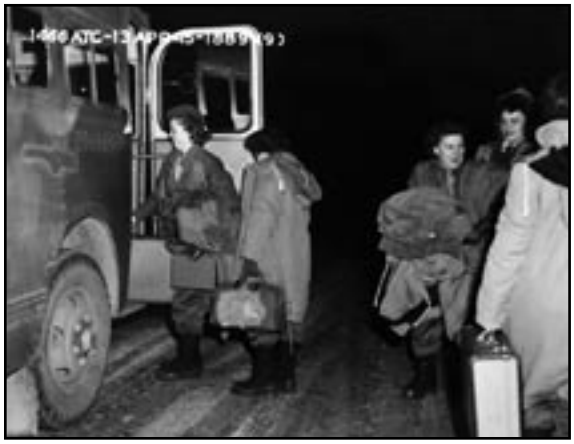

Figure 49. WACs arrive at Ladd Field. Note arctic clothing being worn or carried. Arctic clothing issue for the WACs included: "Long-sleeved and long-legged olive drab winter woolies; two wool OD shirts to be worn one above the other, with necktie; olive drab wool liners, similar to ski pants…to be worn with pile-lined jacket liner weighing an approximate seven pounds; an outer field jacket and outer waterproof ski pants; a hooded pile-lined parka." Wolfe, 4. AAF photo courtesy Betty Wiker.

Northwest Staging Route such as Edmonton, Whitehorse, and Ladd Field. WAC units needed separate barracks, and arctic military clothing for women had to be developed, approved, and issued. Several behind-the-scenes maneuvers made the deployment possible. In 1944, the ATC became the first AAF command to get permission to move WACs to overseas non-combatant duty using a simplified process. By then, arctic military clothing for women had been standardized and construction was underway on a women's barracks at Ladd Field. In the spring of 1945, preparations were completed and on April 14, the WACs arrived at Ladd.

Audrey Virden remembered details of her flight from Great Falls to Ladd Field. "[W]e had to wear all of the wool apparel that they had given us and the plane was heated so we just about roasted…." she wrote. "When we got to Fairbanks the temperature was warmer than it had been in Great Falls."[114]

After settling in, the new arrivals set to work in various capacities. ATC photographs from Ladd Field show WACs employed in the following jobs: motor pool driver, dispatcher, finance clerk, public relations assistant, printing office assistant, postal clerk, aircraft parts warehouse clerk, and on kitchen duty.[115] WACs also served with the AACS at Ladd Field's radio station as radio operators, teletype operators, and message expeditors. When Audrey Virden arrived at Ladd, she was hoping for an airfield position doing mechanical work on aircraft or guiding planes, but she was assigned to Personnel instead. Cpl. Mary Ellen Wolfe became assistant editor of the *Midnight Sun* base newspaper. Verna Buckner was a cook and baker for the unit.

The WACs' quarters were located on the North Post, east of the chapel on Marks Road. The barracks was a wooden theater-of-operations building with several sections. The main element was a two-story inverted U-shape that faced south onto Marks Road. Squad rooms and NCO quarters were located in each wing, while washrooms and supply rooms were in the center segment. In the rear, a one-story extension contained the mess hall, kitchen, and day room. A short hallway connected the extension to the main barracks. Along this hallway was an orderly room and the WAC commander's office. The barracks also had a beauty parlor, a dark room, and a second floor supply room, which had been converted to a

[114] Audrey Virden memoir, correspondence with author, October 2003.
[115] MHR, 1466th AAF Base Unit, September 1945, microfilm AO177, Elmendorf AFB History Office.

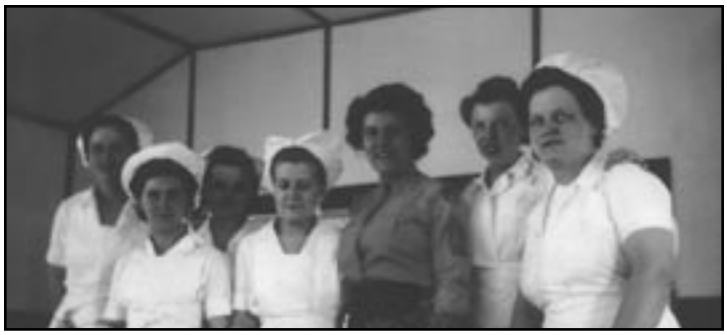

Figure 50. WAC sergeant and cooks celebrate a birthday, June 1945. Courtesy Verna Raymond Buckner.

Figure 51. Audrey Virden and unidentified Sgt Major, Personnel. Courtesy Audrey Virden.

Figure 52. WAC driver and dispatcher. AAF photo, courtesy Betty Wiker.

sewing/ironing room. Audrey Virden recalled that in Ladd slang, the barracks was known as the "WAC shack."

On the afternoon of June 26, only two months after the building was first occupied, fire raged through the barracks. Night shift workers asleep in their bunks were taken by surprise and scrambled to escape. One young enlisted woman, Pfc. Ione Dries, died after being trapped by the blaze. Seventeen other people were treated for injuries, including three who broke their backs jumping out of second story windows. The fire could not be controlled. It spread so rapidly that within two hours, the barracks was completely destroyed, along with all the WACs' spare uniforms and personal effects. While a replacement barracks was being erected at the original site, the WACs were temporarily housed in the hospital annex in the 300 area. Audrey Virden recalled that the temporary arrangement was "much less refined" and that the shower room got so cold there was frost on its concrete walls.

In spite of the tragedy of the barracks fire, the WACs made the most of their Alaskan assignment. When they were off duty, they could participate in activities such as gardening, softball, gold panning, and seeing local sights. On occasion, WACs traveled far from Ladd Field on morale missions. Former CO Betty Etten Wiker remembered accompanying three WACs on a brief tour of the Aleutians, where they serenaded the troops with musical numbers and were heralded as the first WACs to visit the Aleutian garrisons. In July, the ATC flew the 577th AAF dance band and a group of 40 WACs to the airbase at Galena for an evening of dancing with the GIs there. The North Star newspaper reported that, "[p]romptly at midnight – like a mass exodus of Cinderellas – the Wacs took off under protest from many who had made friends in the few hours of their stay."[116]

Overall, women from the unit remembered being welcomed and treated with respect and courtesy by townspeople and the base personnel. Enlisted woman Verna Buckner wrote that she "loved the service" and that joining the WACs allowed her to travel from her hometown in Vermont to see "country I never would have seen."[117]

On December 6, 1945, the WACs departed Ladd Field for discharge back in the States. The women of the 1466th AAF Base Unit Squadron W had been among the 7,000 Air WACs assigned to overseas duty, and had the distinction of being

[116] "Ladd Field Wacs Visit Water-Soaked Galenans," *North Star,* 13 August 1945.
[117] Verna Buckner, correspondence with author, 27 June 2003.

the first WAC unit to serve in Alaska. Along with the AAF nurses and civilian women serving at this airbase, they pioneered the way for the women serving at Fort Wainwright today.

Figure 53. WAC barracks 1945, south elevation facing Marks Road. Today, the Last Frontier Club (Bldg 1044) stands on this site. Courtesy Verna Raymond Buckner.

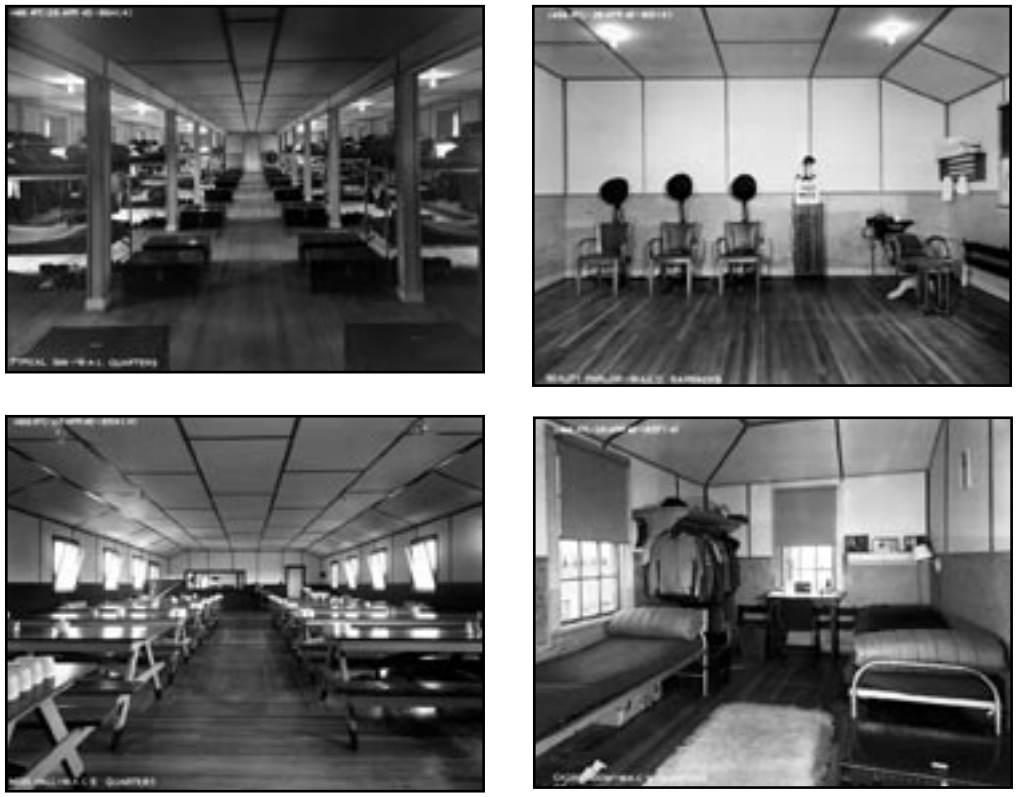

Figure 54. WAC barracks interiors. Clockwise from top left: enlisted bay, beauty parlor, mess hall, cadre room. AAF photos, courtesy Betty Wiker.

Figure 55. Off duty time. Left to right, Duck hunting; winter play; gardening in Fairbanks. Left and right photos courtesy Audrey Virden; center photo courtesy Betty Wiker.

Figure 56. Waiting for the bus in the 300 area. Courtesy Audrey Virden.

Figure 57. Verna R. Buckner and unit mascot "Chena." Courtesy Verna Raymond Buckner.

Figure 58. WACs in Army parkas. Courtesy Audrey Virden.

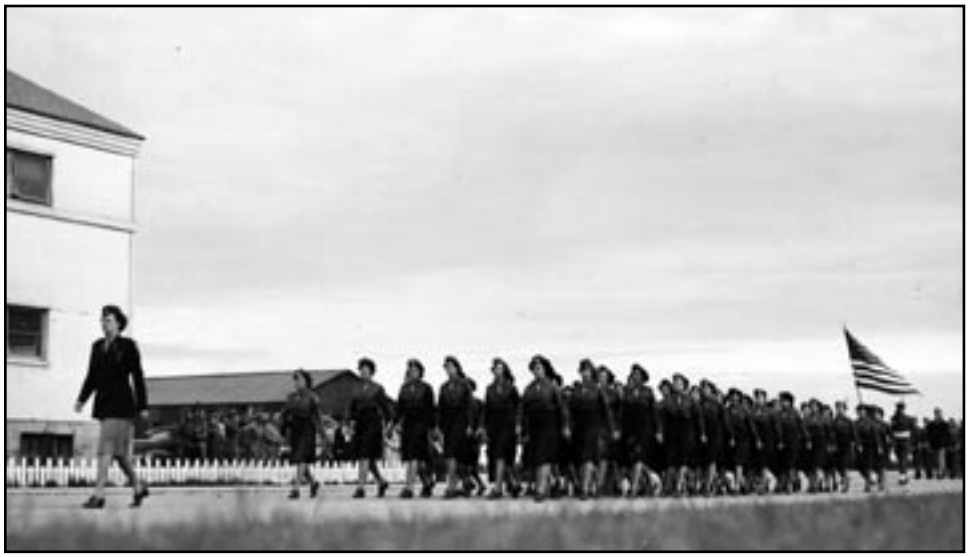

Figure 59. WAC squadron passing in review in front of Hangar One, August 10, 1945. Courtesy Betty Wiker.

Other Military Units

Figure 60. Military and civilian staff, Signal Corps film library. Ferris Copper collection, 99-183-864, Archives and Manuscripts, Alaska and Polar Regions Department, University of Alaska Fairbanks.

The Alaska Railroad was a critical asset for the military services, although it was a civilian operation. During the war it was understaffed because many employees had either enlisted or taken defense jobs elsewhere. Consequently, from the spring of 1943 through the summer of 1945, the Army brought in the 714th Railway Operating Battalion to help keep the railroad running.[118] The battalion, with more than 1,000 enlisted men, was headquartered at Ft. Richardson with detachments assigned along the rail line, including Ladd Field. Their duties included all aspects of railroad operation, from track and bridge maintenance to repair shops to serving on engine crews, and they were integrated with the remaining civilian work force at the railroad. The railroad was an important aspect of Ladd Field's operation. A spur line connected the airfield to the Alaska Railroad's terminus in Fairbanks and ran to various points on the installation.

A variety of other military units were also active at Ladd during the war, but not all of them have been identified. Some of these include a utilities section, a company of military police, and a small base censorship detachment.

Civilian Efforts

For the most part, the contributions and recollections of civilians have been included with the description of the military activities at Ladd. However, the civilian support at Ladd Field was substantial enough to merit a short overview.

Civilian support at Ladd Field was considerable. In the summer of 1944, for example, at least 1,700 civilians were on the base payroll.[119] There were also various contract and commercial staff present at the base but not directly employed by the military.

From the earliest days of Ladd Field, the construction sector employed the largest number of civilians. In 1940, one thousand people were working on Ladd's construction projects. Large numbers of men continued to be employed in construction at Ladd as the airfield expanded through the war, and both men and women worked in a civilian capacity with the Resident Engineer's office.

Civilians also contributed to airfield operations, working in Priorities and Traffic and passenger screening, operations and flight plans, and other related areas. Marie Haggard and Roma Hulse Scougal held positions like these. Civilians were employed by the Weather Bureau as weather observers and forecasters. They also played an important role supporting office activities around Ladd Field. There were administrators handling procurement, typists producing correspondence

[118] Woodman, 327-328.

[119] According to Air Transport Command records, 1,300 of them supported construction activities; another 156 worked for the Post Engineer, 108 directly for the Army Air Forces, and smaller numbers supported quartermaster and base installation functions. MHR, August 1944. A similar count for December 1944 was 1193, reflecting a drop in the construction figure. MHR, December 1944

Figure 61. Power plant ca 1944. Detail, Rex Wood photo.

and reports, and finance clerks crunching numbers and preparing payments. Supply clerks, teletype and telephone operators, secretaries, and messengers all kept the offices humming with activity. Josephine Johnson was a finance clerk, and typed paychecks for the civilian staff. Audrey K. Johnston started out as a messenger in Hangar One and later worked for the Air Corps supply depot. The AACS had civilians working as teletype operators and cryptography secretaries.[120]

The power plant relied heavily on civilian staffing for its operation. The main plant was located just northwest of Hangar One facing the quadrangle and it generated power from coal-fired boilers. Richard Frank came to work at the power plant when he was a very young man. Originally from the Athabaskan village of Rampart, he came to Ladd early in 1945 after working for a time on the Alaska Railroad. His job was to help fire the boilers. "It was busy shift work, [we]'d work eight hour shifts," he remembered. "I enjoyed it. I didn't mind the pay, I don't remember how much I made. But it was work, and it was something that I felt that I was making a contribution." Frank then volunteered to join the Air Corps and served in the South Pacific as an aircraft mechanic.

It appears that most civilians at Ladd were employed directly by the government, but commercial contract personnel also worked at Ladd Field as Cold Weather Test technical representatives and contract airline employees. The Cold Weather Test Detachment hosted as many as 120 civilian technical representatives from various manufacturers. Both Northwest Airlines and Western Airlines operated flights on contract for the ATC and those operators had some staff at Ladd.[121]

Occasionally there was friction between civilians and military authority. Thelma Walker of the Resident Engineer office recalled one incident in particular. After the Pearl Harbor attacks, Ladd Field was on high alert. All the secretaries in her office kept gas masks at their desks and everyone had to participate in air raid drills. When they heard the alarm, they were instructed to evacuate to an outdoor dugout shelter covered with a tent tarp. However, it was December and it was Fairbanks. Thelma reported that during the first drill, the temperature was 40 below zero. Nevertheless, everyone went out to the shelter, put on the gas masks, and waited out the drill in the bitter cold. To compound the misery of sitting still outdoors in the deep cold, they discovered that the masks they wore were awkward and almost impossible to use. At that temperature, condensation froze inside them instantly. Thelma decided that if she were going to get bombed, it would be in her office and not in the frozen shelter. The next time there was a drill, she declined to take part. The NCO in charge promptly fired her for insubordination. Just as promptly, Chief Engineer Col. Bush rehired her. It turned out she was too valuable to lose: Thelma was one of the few on staff who

[120] *Ladd Field Midnight Sun,* 10 Nov 44, 5.

[121] More information about the role of commercial airlines on the northwest staging route can be found in Smith, *Warplanes to Alaska,* and Carr, *Great Falls to Nome.* See Chapter 3 for information on cold weather testing and manufacturers' tech reps. Other contract operations may have existed at Ladd but have not been researched.

knew shorthand, and it was her job to listen in to the Chief Engineer's high-level confidential phone conversations to take notes.[122]

Often, the assistance of civilians can be such a natural part of an installation's operations that it goes unnoticed. At least once, though, the Ladd Field command took note of this civilian help. In October, 1944, Ladd commanding officer Col. R. Keillor awarded the Asiatic-Pacific ribbon for Civilian Service to over 200 Ladd employees. In a ceremony at the post theater, Keillor told the group, "Too often perhaps we have taken your efficiency, your splendid co-operation and teamwork for granted…I think one reason why we haven't said more along those lines is because we have always considered you a part of the team…I realize that sometimes each one of us, as individuals, may think that his or her job is not very important – it is dull, routine, monotonous, and doesn't seem urgent to the war effort." He added, "But let me assure you that your job is important, and the men fighting on the ground, and on the sea, and in the sky know…that you are definitely part of their team."[123]

[122] Personal communication, Thelma Walker, 19 August 2003.
[123] "Civilians Lauded at Ceremony," *Ladd Field Midnight Sun,* 27 October 1944, 1.